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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE AND IPA; NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/MUSTAFA

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KPAL](#) [KWBG](#) [MCAP](#) [MOPS](#)
SUBJECT: PA SECURITY FORCES: CONTINUED LACK OF CLARITY IN
REPORTING RELATIONSHIPS

REF: A. JERUSALEM 1382

[1](#)B. JERUSALEM 799

[1](#)C. JERUSALEM 1346

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles. Reasons: 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) Over a week after the assumption of power by the Hamas cabinet, the reporting relationships of the component parts of the PA Security Forces (PASF) remain unclear - both to us and to Palestinians. Hamas Interior Minister Said Siyam was named on March 29 by incoming PM Hanniyyah, and Siyam has moved to assert control over the Interior Ministry and the PASF. However, outgoing Interior Minister Nasser Youssef has publicly asserted that large sections of the PASF should report to President Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) rather than the new Interior Minister, basing his objection on a strict reading of the Basic Law and ignoring later decrees. Youssef went so far as to distribute a decree establishing a "Committee of Officers" to govern PASF promotions and retirements; Presidential Chief of Staff Rafiq Hussein subsequently issued another decree canceling Youssef's, and saying that any such decisions were up to the President. Presidential Advisor Ghaith al-Omri told Consul General on April 5 that Abu Mazen is reviewing what to do with the National Security Forces (NSF) and is considering various individuals for the role of National Security Advisor. In the interim, Omri said that Abu Mazen may appoint one or more senior advisors to deal with security issues.

New Interior Minister

[1](#)2. (C) On March 29, incoming PM Ismael Hanniyyah named Said Siyam as Interior Minister. Siyam specifically requested that his ministerial headquarters be established in the al-Saraya building in Gaza - the main headquarters of the PASF - in a move interpreted by many as Hamas asserting control over the PASF. Siyam was offered, and rejected, an office in an Interior Ministry office in Gaza. (Note: Under current arrangements, the Interior Ministry controls all components of the PASF except for General Intelligence, Force 17, and the Presidential Guard, which report to the President. In particular, the estimated 11,000-strong National Security Forces (NSF) reports to the Interior Ministry pursuant to a Presidential Decree, even though under the Basic Law it is under the command of the President. End note.) Ref (a) reports the concerns of some NSF members that they are now being specifically targeted by the IDF simply

because their organization reports to a Hamas Interior Minister.

Challenges by Old Interior Minister

¶3. (C) Former Interior Minister Nasser Youssef, a Major General in the NSF, has pushed to force the issue of command relationships. On March 30, he met with Minister Siyam and in a follow-on press conference said that the NSF does not report to the Interior Minister, but rather to the President. He told the press that he informed Siyam of the Basic Law's description of command relationships, under which only the Preventive Security Organization, Civil Defense, and the Civil Police report to the Interior Minister. Youssef refused to answer media questions about the President's decision to place the majority of the security forces under the Interior Minister, saying that such questions were to be resolved by the President.

¶4. (C) On April 3, Youssef issued a directive deriving from the Security Services Law (2005) to form the "Committee of Officers," headed by himself and composed also of:

- Senior NSF commander Major General Jamal abu Zayed;
- Gaza NSF commander Sliman Hillis;
- NSF commander for political guidance Mazen Izzedin;
- General Intelligence Chief Tarik Abu Rajab;
- Senior NSF administrative officer Mohammed Yousef Haj Salem;
- Civil Police chief Ala Husni;
- PSO chief Rashid Abu Shubak; and
- Civil Defense chief Saqer Mujahed.

¶5. (C) The duties of the Committee, as outlined in the decree, are to review officer promotions between the ranks of lieutenant colonel and brigadier general and to retire officers who meet the retirement requirements. It is not clear under what authority Nasser al-Youssef issued his directive, and he signed the letter as "Minister of Interior and National Security," even though he ceased to be the minister on March 29. (Comment: The committee and purpose appear to track with the entity discussed by West Bank Intelligence Chief Tawfiq Tirawi in a conversation with PolChief on February 23 (ref b). The administrative aspect of the committee also appears to tally with the Committee raised by PA advisor Akram Hanniyyah in his April 1 discussion with NEA A/S Welch and DAPNSA Abrams (ref c). End comment.)

¶6. (C) Presidential Chief of Staff Rafiq Hussein subsequently issued a directive canceling Nasser Youssef's communication, copied to the members of the proposed committee. In his announcement, Hussein said that Youssef's action was illegal, and that such actions were reserved to the President.

Presidential Advisor on Abu Mazen Thinking

¶7. (C) Presidential Advisor Ghaith al-Omri told Consul General on April 5 that Abu Mazen is considering what to do with the NSF. Omri suggested that Abu Mazen is now leaning in the direction of asserting control over the NSF. Consul General emphasized that clarity is important so that the U.S government can determine how it can interact with the security forces. Omri also reported that Abu Mazen is still considering various individuals for the role of National Security Advisor. As an interim step, he suggested Abu Mazen may appoint one or more senior advisors to deal with security issues for the President until a National Security Advisor is named.

Comment

18. (C) Nasser Youssef's actions are likely the result of his seeking to stake out a role in the still-murky PASF command relationships, as well as to preserve a leading role for himself. Abu Mazen, in a series of conversations with us over the last several months, has repeatedly said that he did not intend to exercise operational control over the majority of the PASF. The Committee of Officers approach - even if headed by someone other than Youssef - would still exercise only administrative control, leaving the actual direction regarding use of the forces to the Hamas-controlled MOI. The overall confusion speaks to the need for Abu Mazen to move forward on naming a National Security Advisor, fill out the presidential national security staff, decide what to do with the NSF, and articulate how the President intends to handle national security issues in dealing with a Hamas cabinet.

WALLES